

2021 Christmas Banquet

Year in Review

Today's reading comes from the 57th chapter of the Deuterocanonical book of Nutana Park Mennonite Church. This, then, is the 57th year since the deportation of the Nutana-ites from their 1st Mennonite homeland.

I was ambling along the banks of the river South Saskatchewan a blustery January day and the word of the LORD came to me saying, "mortal, I will give you visions of what was and what is and what will be." And the first of the visions came.

There appeared to me four beasts arising out of the deep: COVID-19, UK variant, Delta variant and Oba Krahn. I was perplexed because I know Krahns and I know them to be good people; how could one of the beasts be Oba or Oma Krahn, I wondered. "Ach du Leibe Zeit", a voice thundered. This is not Oba or Oma Krahn, mortal; think Greek and not plaut-Deutsch". Ah, I sighed, Omicron.

The beasts took the form of the four horsemen of the apocalypse and they were traversing the earth on winged steeds. The devastation was terrible to behold, particularly among the poor and otherwise disadvantaged. And I wept. How long, oh LORD, how long—I cried out? "For a year, another year, and a year and a half, and possibly another year after that. And hear this, O mortal, in this time of testing some will become hunks, some will become monks, some will become chunks, and some will become drunks. You, O mortal, are beginning to look a bit chunky—pay attention, oh mortal, pay attention". The vision continued.

Four prophets appeared to stand against the four horsemen. These evangelists bore the names of Wong, Neudorf, Mujahajim, and Shaw. They were offering words of wisdom and hope. They sought to non-violently do battle with the beasts. There was precious little assistance from the imperial magistrates, but the evangelists witnessed on.

In this vision the exiles of Nutana Park Mennonite headed the word of the evangelists. They remained masked. The doors of the church opened modestly, and then more modestly, and then even more so. With this the first vision ended. This being the first month of the year.

I was recovering from another ZOOM meeting and the word of the LORD came to me saying, "mortal, prepare a place for my people to worship with me. They shall neither be too near nor too distant. They shall neither be too great in number nor too small in number. You shall follow the Health Authority guidelines but you shall be more cautious when necessary. The sanctuary shall be measured, measured again, and measured thrice, and then be sectioned. Areas of the Temple acreage shall be made unavailable. Hand sanitizer shall be ever present. Masks shall be mandatory. These are a people precious to me, oh mortal, I have called them by name and they are mine. Welcome them home and take care of them.

In the vision children were once again appearing in person: they could be seen gathering to sing, present for a children's time, partaking of Peace Club. Adults visited on the lawn. These were scenes of hope.

How, Oh LORD, will this come to be? And how will we know it is you? "I Am who I Am. I will raise up for you a caretaker and an administrative assistant. His name will be Don and her name will be Gwen. He will wipe down the pews, rope off sections of the sanctuary, and otherwise tend to my biddings for the well being of my dwelling. She will do all manner of office work. I am telling you this, mortal, so that when it comes to pass you will know it has been my strong arm". And with this the second vision ended. This being the early months of the year.

I found myself languishing on the couch in front of the television watching replays of former sport glory, and the word of the LORD came to me saying, "mortal, you shall go and serve an additional people". Your people, these exiles of Nutana are enough, I replied in a cranky tone. "My people go beyond your people, oh mortal. You shall serve them". Where are these people found?, I asked. "They are not beyond the river Styx; they are beyond the 1st River but not the next. You will know them when they call. You will serve them". I wrapped myself tightly in an afghan and was speechless. There ended the vision from the 3rd month of the year.

I was out on an acreage one late spring day and those gathered said, "take this rollkuchen and eat". I took the rollkuchen and I ate. And then I ate another. And another. And then I fell into a carbohydrate infused trance which was like sleep. "Mortal, there shall be an anointing". And with that a being appeared but the face was like the sun and I could not bear to look at it. Who, Oh Lord, who? "Your colleague, mortal. Don't be so obtuse or dense. She will be ordained as a shepherd of my people". And in this vision I saw a Canada Goose, a Canada Goose not a dove or an albatross, descending upon the radiant figure undoubtedly signalling God's pleasure—Goose down and fat surly being a sign of favour. At least she will be warm and well fed, I thought. Therein the vision ended. This was in the sixth month of the year.

I was in my kitchen making salsa from the abundance of tomatoes and a vision came to me. "Mortal, the roof must be raised. My people live in gorgeous and glorious homes and yet my house leaks. This shall not be, mortal. I will raise up contributions and I will raise up loans for which funds do not cover and I will raise up Flynn. They shall park their trucks in the lot and mostly work. You will know it is me by the dust which settles on your desk and the light covers which fall to the ground and by the heating vents they cover. My house shall be rebuilt, oh mortal, so do not fear the carnage or the Tim Horten's coffee cup trash or the stomping of

feet or the grinding sounds you hear from up top. My house shall be rebuilt”. Therein the vision ended. I fell on the kitchen floor in awe and in terror covering my head with a tea towel. This was in the 7th month of the year.

I was cleaning out my garden on an Autumn Day and a vision came to me. The church staff were gathered for a staff meeting and an eagle descended upon us and plucked Youth Worker Sarah from our midst. The eagle was a magnificent creature and terrifying at the same time. I cried out and the eagle spoke. “Do not worry mortal, she will be fine. I am taking her to a better place—the University of Saskatchewan. There I will continue teaching her the ways of wisdom, compassion and service. Not to mention she will have more time for her family while writing papers from home”. Stunned, I questioned, but who will be shepherd of the younger sheep? The eagle spoke again, “One who serves the greater Mennonite tribe will contribute. And I will sustain the willing spirits among you as you continue to nurture the young and teach the youth. Do not forget, mortal, I love my people and they are mine”. As the eagle flew away the vision ended.

The seventh and final vision came during the full moon in the last month of year. I was tucked underneath a quilt staving off the dark and cold trying to decide if this was a good day to simply call in sick and remain in bed for the duration of the year when the vision came. In this vision there was a stream flowing into the temple. The stream carried many and varied things. I beheld peppernuts and puppy chow, chocolates and choke-cherry wine, zwieback and socks, cards and cash, toques and toiletries, and other sundry goodness all flowing into the temple—signs of care for the temple servants, temple maintenance and the community. And I saw a second stream flowing out of the temple. Varied tributaries contributing to this outflow of goodness and grace; streaming from the temple out in all directions. And then a voice spoke.

“Do not be afraid of the perpetual dark, the black ice, or pending travel restrictions, mortal. You may not be able to journey to see your biological family, but I have brought you to a people that is a multitude from every nation, tribe, and language. These shall be your people. Fear not. If you simply go to the temple you will find treasures upon treasures. Now get out of bed, go to the office, and write down what you have been given to see and hear.” And with that the seventh vision ended.

These then have been the seven visions granted in 2021 to Patrick Preheim, co-keeper of the eternal flame at Nutana Park Mennonite Church

Patrick Preheim, co-pastor Nutana Park Mennonite Church